

Remarks at Kazan Cathedral and an Exchange With Reporters in St. Petersburg April 19, 1996

The President. This morning, I have had three very moving experiences: first at the cemetery, the most powerful reminder imaginable about the heroism of the Russian soldiers and the devotion of Russian citizens to the freedom of this country, and then at the Russian Museum, a wonderful picture of the magnificent history of Russian art, and of course here at this cathedral with its remarkable story, a reminder of the power of belief in the spirit in Russian history and the Russian character.

These experiences remind us of Russia's past and its achievements of the present and the remarkable changes that are going on. They also give me great confidence in the future of this country and what we can accomplish together in the spirit of peace and mutual respect and genuine partnership. And so, I feel a great deal of gratitude to the people of St. Petersburg today for these experiences that I have shared with them, and I thank them for giving me the opportunity that I have enjoyed, especially this remarkable moment at the cathedral, learning of its past, its present, and what we all hope will be its future.

Thank you.

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, at a place of peace like this church, what thoughts might be coming—Mr. President, coming to a place of peace like this great cathedral, I wonder if it might bring to mind any thoughts for your peace effort in the Middle East?

The President. Well, I think that the parties have got to agree to a cease-fire. It's obvious

that they're neighbors, and as we have seen in the terrible events of the last few days, once someone starts the spiral of violence, it's hard to stop. And because the rockets are fired from the areas they're fired from, it's almost impossible for innocent civilians not to be hurt and killed.

We had the situation there in hand, as you know, for more than 2 years because of the peace agreement that was brokered in '93 by the Secretary of State. He is going back there. Mr. Ross is there. We are doing our very best.

Q. Do you have any information that would lead you to believe that both sides will agree to the cease-fire, and what's the status right now of the negotiations?

The President. Well, I'm getting regular updates. Mr. Ross is—I think he is actually there now, and the Secretary of State will go as quickly as he finishes his talks with the Chinese Foreign Minister. And obviously, we have direct contacts with all the parties involved. I think they are looking for a way to stop the fighting, and so I am somewhat hopeful.

I do believe they are looking for a way to stop it. I think that it's obvious now that there's almost no way to contain it or prevent the loss of innocent life once the rockets start firing and the retaliation begins. So I think we have a chance, and we are going to work very hard today and tomorrow and see if we can do it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:05 p.m. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

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Q. Mr. President, can I ask you—anything you wanted to see in particular?

The President. I saw the Impressionists' paintings; I wanted to see them. And I wanted to

see the living quarters of Catherine the Great. [Laughter]

Q. How did it compare to yours?

The President. I like mine just fine. [Laughter]